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(Drafting Office and Officer)

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Approved In S
7/9/62

Memorandum of Conversation

RECEIVED

DATE: March 20, 1962
7:30 p.m.

SUBJECT: Germany and Berlin

Downgraded To: SECRET

EO 11652: XDS

Authorized By: [Signature]

August 4, 1965

Soviet Mission,
Geneva, Switzerland

PARTICIPANTS: United States
The Secretary
Mr. Bohlen
Mr. Kohler
Ambassador Thompson
Mr. Akalovsky

USSR
Mr. Gromyko
Mr. Semenov
Mr. Kovalev
Mr. Bondarenko
Mr. Sukhodrev

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Mr. Gromyko hosted a dinner at the Soviet Mission.

Following a brief conversation on how the disarmament conference should proceed, in the course of which the Secretary had pointed out the relationship between the Crisis around Berlin and the possibility of achieving disarmament, Mr. Gromyko suggested that no crises should be created and claimed that the Soviet proposals were designed to knock the ground from under crises. He compared the present situation to the walking on a tight rope, which was fraught with all sorts of possible surprises. A situation where there was no peace treaty, where troops were stationed in West Berlin, where the occupation regime prevailed in that city, and where the sovereign rights of the GDR were encroached upon, may generate situations neither of the two sides wanted.

The Secretary responded by saying that, in his view, the situation we were facing today was as follows: The Soviet Union had made some proposals since 1958 which were unacceptable to the West in the literal sense of the word. The fact that the Soviet Union had pursued those proposals for three years might be an indication of the importance the Soviet Union attached to them, but this did not make them more acceptable. The Secretary expressed the view that the exchanges between the US and the USSR which had taken place since the Kennedy administration had taken office indicated that there was no movement toward agreement. What the United States had said at Vienna and in the subsequent exchanges, apparently had made little impression in Moscow. However, the Secretary emphasized, everything that had been stated by the U.S. was

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really meant and meant seriously. The Secretary said that when we had come to Geneva it was quite apparent that the two sides were not in agreement and that there was very little prospect of finding agreement. Therefore, the question now was how to deal with the fact of disagreement. He suggested that one way would be to start from the existing situation. The Soviet Union had also suggested this approach but without taking into account the complete set of facts. The Soviet Union had said that there were two Germanies, but there was also the fact that Berlin, and particularly West Berlin, also existed. The Secretary emphasized that unless there was a radical change in the Soviet attitude expressed since 1958 with respect to the vital interests of the West, it was difficult to see how an understanding could be reached, and thus our problem was to find ways of handling disagreement without conflict which would have disastrous consequences for both of our countries and the whole Northern Hemisphere as well.

Mr. Gromyko responded that if the United States expected a radical change in the Soviet position, i.e., abandonment by the USSR of its proposals for a change in the West Berlin situation, for a German peace treaty, and for respect of the sovereignty of the GDR, then this was in vain since the USSR would never agree to such a proposition. Both sides could and must seek a solution that would meet the interests of both sides. Such a solution would provide for: (1) a German peace treaty -- perhaps without Western participation, which would be regrettable; (2) a change in the abnormal situation in West Berlin, a situation which had ensued from Germany's surrender; and (3) a change in the situation with regard to respect for the sovereignty of the GDR, which was now quite intolerable. He asserted that if both sides desired to reach agreement, agreement could be reached. On the other hand, if there was no such desire, the situation was quite different and the USSR would have to take alone such steps as it had mentioned previously on numerous occasions.

The Secretary observed that the conversation was moving towards clarification. The Soviet Union had said that the West should withdraw. We had said that we had a position in West Berlin which we would maintain. These positions were in contradiction and the problem was what we should do. We were prepared to deal with the factual situation, and we were also prepared to deal with the theoretical situation by advancing proposals on how the German situation should be resolved permanently. What we could not accept was when the USSR said one thing should be taken on the basis of facts and another on the basis of theory. Neither side must act like a mother giving a spoonful of bitter medicine to her child and saying "Take it, it's good for you". Each side knew what its vital interests were and they must

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prevent a clash neither of them wanted. The Secretary recalled the President's remarks to Adzhubei that some problems may be affected by time. Berlin may become more manageable with time. However, the Secretary pointed out, this should not be interpreted as a desire to procrastinate. He stressed that the USSR had denied Western vital interests for more than 3 years and the US did not like that delay. If we were to hurry, hurry toward agreement was one thing; but if the hurry was not toward agreement then Moscow and Washington must think what they were hurrying to.

Mr. Gromyko observed that bitter medicine sometimes helped the patient. Remarking that taste was a subjective matter, he professed bewilderment why the Soviet proposals were considered bitter. The USSR held the opposite view, since its proposals for a free city of West Berlin in connection with a German peace treaty was designed to eliminate a source of friction, and there was nothing bitter involved here. He asserted that the West always ascribed sinister motives to the USSR.

Referring to the Secretary's remarks that the Soviet Union had been refusing over three years to recognize the Western rights in Berlin, he claimed that this was not so and that the USSR was merely trying to eliminate the abnormal situation which had resulted from Germany's unconditional surrender. As to the Secretary's remark about facts and theory, he contended that this was a somewhat arbitrary way of interpreting the situation. The USSR believed that there were main facts as well as subsidiary or secondary facts. The decisive fact was that two Germanies existed as independent states. 17 years had passed since World War II without a peace treaty and the USSR had concluded that a change was necessary. As to the Secretary's query how the USSR claimed to proceed on the basis of facts but sought change, he asserted that there was no contradiction here. All the USSR wanted was to normalize the situation in Germany and Berlin and draw a line under World War II through the conclusion of a peace treaty and by solving the West Berlin problem on that basis. The Soviet Union had been repeating this phrase because it wanted to convince the West. After all the Soviet Union was negotiating and there was nothing else it could do in that situation other than write and talk.

Mr. Gromyko contended that the USSR was negotiating with the US in the hope that agreement could be reached. The United States had also said that it wanted agreement. The Secretary had said today that perhaps an understanding could be reached on the basis of the existing factual situation. But such an understanding would also represent agreement. The Secretary had said in New York that both sides should agree on the factual situation,

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but it was quite clear that agreement must somehow be recorded and formalized. A peace treaty, even without Western participation, would do that, while agreement on other matters could be formalized with Western participation. If the US were not to say that it wished agreement, the USSR would proceed differently. But since the US stated that it wanted agreement, the USSR was negotiating with it.

The group then moved to the adjoining room for Coffee.

The Secretary resumed the conversation by stating that he wished to draw a distinction between negotiation and action. We had no doubt that any government was free to raise any proposals as a matter of negotiations, even though the other side might regard those proposals to be outrageous. However, we were most concerned when suggestions were raised which contemplated action without the consent of the other side. If Moscow desired to stabilize the situation on the basis of the existing facts, we had considerable understanding for this. This would be a reflection of events which had taken place during and since the war. However, it was our view that the heart of the existing situation was our presence in West Berlin and the freedom of access to West Berlin. It would be one thing to stabilize the situation and record it in a treaty on the basis of the existing situation in West Berlin and the existing access, as had been done in the Zorin-Bolz understanding, whereas it was quite a different thing to propose a treaty providing for change in the situation and contemplating action. This was so elementary to us that we could not understand why the other side did not regard it elementary as well.

Referring to the Soviet paper received yesterday, the Secretary stated it was disappointing since it provided no basis for discussion. The paper took no account of what the President had said in Vienna or of US statements through the various channels. It merely reflected the Soviet position advanced three years ago and no solution was possible for that basis. Reiterating that both sides could either reach agreement on the basis of the existing situation or make proposals how the situation should be changed and then negotiated, the Secretary stated that the US had not done the latter because it believed that the prospects of understanding were better on the basis of the situation existing now and in the near future.

The Secretary then strongly emphasized that it was important to be clear as to what was the heart of the matter here. He stated that the United States was in no sense prisoner of the FRG; in other words, it was not merely following with reluctance the lead from someone it was not responsible for.

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What we were concerned with here were the vital interests of the United States. The Secretary said he assumed that Mr. Gromyko acted on the same basis in his relations with East Germany, and stressed again that what we were talking about was US national interests.

The Secretary then referred to some points discussed over the past weeks. He expressed the belief that reconciliation of the freedom of access and of what the USSR called the sovereignty of the GDR, should not present a problem, since similar arrangements were made throughout the world almost every day. With regard to the status of West Berlin, he said that we preferred to refer to Berlin as a whole, but the USSR said that this was not a subject for discussion. As to West Berlin, the United States view was that West Berlin was not part of West Germany. It was a separate territory under our responsibility but free to choose its way of life and establish relations with the outside world. With reference to Mr. Gromyko's interest in the question of frontiers, the Secretary stated that this should not present a great problem either. He reiterated most emphatically that the US was in Berlin and that it will stay there, and stated that it will be well if this was clearly understood. The United States would stay in Berlin until there was a broad change, such as an all-German settlement, a general settlement of East-West relations or a general settlement in the disarmament field. However, under present circumstances, the US would stay in West Berlin. As to the Soviet Union suggestion that UN troops be stationed in West Berlin, the Secretary said that if Mr. Gromyko meant US, UK and French troops, we might go so far as to think about it. Otherwise, such an arrangement would not be possible.

Mr. Gromyko said that the heart of the matter was whether the two sides wished to negotiate seriously or to procrastinate. The USSR proceeded on the premise that both sides desired to reach real understanding. The US had referred to difficulties with some of its allies. This was something for the United States to judge, but the USSR was negotiating with the US as the representative of the West, since it knew that the US had influence with its allies. The USSR had been negotiating with the US most seriously; otherwise it would have not displayed such scrupulous and tolerant attitude throughout all the exchanges since Vienna. As Mr. Khrushchev has stated to the President, Germany was the only source of friction between the United States and the USSR, and if that source were eliminated everybody would sign with relief.

Mr. Gromyko continued that he was gratified that the Secretary believed it possible to reconcile the two requirements related to access. Since the

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USSR also believed in that possibility, a mutually acceptable solution should be feasible. On the other hand, the question was to what kind of West Berlin access should lead. The USSR categorically refused to accept the United States proposition that the Western presence should be continued and that no change should be introduced. He contended that while earlier the US had stated that access was the main problem, now that a possibility of resolving that problem had emerged the US stated that there should be no change in West Berlin.

The Secretary interjected that this was nothing new. As the President had stated to Mr. Khrushchev, we could not accept any diminution of the Western position in Berlin.

Mr. Gromyko went on to say that US statements to the effect that the West was present in West Berlin to protect the interests and what it called the way of life of West Berlin, ignored Soviet statements that the USSR was also in favor of such protection. He contended that the Secretary was now circumventing this element of the Soviet position completely, whereas in New York he had asked questions on how West Berlin's freedom would be ensured. He said that judging from the Secretary's statements, the US did not appreciate the steps the Soviet Union had made to narrow the gap between the respective positions of the two sides and toward reaching an understanding. He cited the Soviet paper of March 19 as one of such steps, and ascertained that it took into account some of the considerations expressed by the US and general principles mentioned by the Secretary. He said that it was good to hear that the Secretary believed that there was no problem with regards to frontiers and some other matters, and this was a positive factor. The Soviet paper of March 19 had been advanced in order to narrow the gap between the position of the two sides; however, the Secretary had now said that this proposal was almost a step backward. He expressed the hope that the United States would study the paper most carefully and give a reply to it.

Referring to the question of access, Mr. Gromyko noted that the US had repeatedly stated that it was not clear how access would be organized in practice, and how respect for the sovereignty of GDR should be understood in connection with the transit of persons and goods. He contended that the Soviet position on this score had been explained in Vienna, New York and Washington, as well as to Spaak, Fanfani, and some American journalists who must have informed the US Government. Nevertheless, the US appeared still not to have a completely clear picture of how this problem would be handled in practice. Taking into account all this, and in particular the private talks the Secretary and he, Gromyko, had last week and the day before, the

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Soviet delegation had considered the matter and had decided that it would be useful to provide the United States with additional clarification with regard to access and transit so that nothing would remain unclear. Mr. Gromyko then produced a paper saying it was a working paper which he hoped the US would study.

The Secretary responded that he first wished to comment on the paper received the day before. He stated that he was quite sure that if that paper were referred to the United States and allied governments they would have a negative impression of the paper. Therefore, he did not believe it useful to treat the paper as a formal expression of Soviet views. He said that in terms of the discussion in Geneva, he was inclined to suggest to Mr. Gromyko to take the paper back, but was not doing so because that would have a connotation in diplomatic practice which he did not intend. The Secretary expressed the view that flexibility should be maintained in these contacts until both sides moved toward agreement.

The Secretary then raised the question of how both sides should proceed further. He reiterated emphatically that when the President had stated that our vital interests included: (1) our presence in West Berlin; (2) freedom of access as it had been understood for many years; and (3) freedom of West Berlin to choose its own way of life, he used the word "vital" in its literal sense. The Secretary then suggested that the time had come when exchange of unilateral papers was not nearly as important as discussion of vital interests as seen by each of the two sides and represented by them here and as the search for reconciliation of those interests if possible. He observed that this was the real task of foreign ministers. He then suggested that perhaps starting Thursday as much time as possible be devoted to that purpose, leaving Wednesday for whatever communications either side might need with its government. He stated that the President was anxious for him to come back from Geneva with an idea of how the world would proceed from here, and remarked that he was not sure that the situation had been considered in all of its ramifications. Referring to the Soviet paper of today, the Secretary stated that he was inclined not to receive it unless he had some indication as to its contents, because he did not see any value in exchanging papers which could not serve as a basis for agreement.

The Secretary continued that he wished to emphasize one point. Over 200 million people live in ^{the} USSR and about 180 million in the US. The question was how we should relate these interests to the broad interests of our people. In the framework of the broad interests of our peoples, these problems were peripheral. However, some of these marginal problems

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may become central overnight. This was not a matter of logic of one side because the other side may not follow the same logic. Both sides must reconcile their interests and prevent a clash which would create danger. The Secretary observed that, in terms of history, the problem discussed here was not such as it was now being built up. Nevertheless, both sides must see how to reconcile their respective interests involved.

Mr. Gromyko wondered whether he had understood the Secretary correctly that he was not interested in the Soviet views on access. He noted that if the Secretary was concerned about the form of the document, he should take note of the fact that it was only a working paper.

The Secretary expressed the view that both sides while in Geneva had an opportunity of finding out their respective views. If papers were exchanged a procedure would be instituted which would be more formal than it was wise under the circumstances. He stated that we were of course interested in Soviet views, but suggested that caution with regard to papers was in order. If the latest Soviet paper was of a personal nature, he might perhaps read it and return it with annotations; however, he did not wish to receive at this point more formal papers involving his and other governments. In other words, the Secretary said he was concerned about the procedure leading toward a solution and not a procedure that would inflame the situation further. Over the past three years, too much literature had been exchanged and too little agreement had been reached.

Mr. Gromyko replied that if the Secretary had difficulties from the standpoint of formal procedure, he could give the paper to the Secretary on a personal basis or read it to him.

The Secretary inquired about the length of the paper. Mr. Gromyko replied it was 3½ pages long.

The Secretary then suggested that perhaps Mr. Gromyko and himself might designate their associates to look at the paper. Mr. Gromyko declined the suggestion, saying that Mr. Rusk was the Secretary of State and he the Foreign Minister and that it was they who should handle this matter.

The Secretary then agreed to receive the paper as a working paper given to him by Mr. Gromyko on a personal basis. He noted that if the paper contained no basis for discussion, Mr. Gromyko might consider it as not having been given.

Mr. Gromyko reiterated that the paper was merely a working paper and

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was not an aide memoire or a formal note.

Referring to the Secretary's remark on the number of people living in the USSR and the United States and their interests, Mr. Gromyko professed surprise at the trend of that remark, which he claimed implied that the USSR wanted to pocket West Berlin. He asserted that the USSR had no need for West Berlin, which was populated by only 2,200,000 people. The USSR only wished a peace treaty and a solution of the West Berlin problem on the basis of such a treaty. The USSR sincerely wished an understanding with the United States in this respect.

The Secretary interjected that he had not meant to imply what Mr. Gromyko had just referred to, but had merely wished to state that the two governments had a responsibility for their peoples and must consider their interests in the world. He also noted that he did not wish to imply anything with regard to the balance of power.

Mr. Gromyko continued by asserting that a solution of the question of a German peace treaty would be in the interest of both sides and in the interest of peace in Europe. The Soviet Union had told the US its ideas with regard to a possible solution of that problem. It had also stated its preference for a solution on the basis of agreement with US. Likewise, the Soviet Union had expressed readiness to sign a peace treaty without Western participation but with an understanding with the West with regard to such matters as frontiers, etc. Mr. Gromyko reiterated that he categorically rejected attempts to portray the situation as if the Soviet Union or the GDR wished to get hold of West Berlin. With regard to the Secretary's suggestion for further discussion on Thursday, Mr. Gromyko wondered what significance should be attached to that date, asserted that he was prepared to negotiate Wednesday, Thursday or any other day. He said that he might be mistaken but he was under the impression that the Secretary wished to communicate with his Government and that there upon he would be prepared to engage in more detailed negotiations.

The Secretary replied that there was no magic about Thursday but noted that the conference schedule and other engagements would not make it possible to meet the following day. He stressed, however, that he was prepared to continue the discussion even tonight. The Secretary then observed that he had planned to stay in Geneva about 10 days. Although he had some important appointments in Washington, if profitable discussions should develop he would be prepared to stay as long as necessary because this was the most important point on the agenda and also one of the most important aspects of disarmament among other things. He wondered whether Thursday afternoon would be a convenient time for a further meeting.

Mr. Gromyko

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Mr. Gromyko replied that he was available for further discussions at any time while in Geneva. He observed that the Secretary's departure date was something for the Secretary to decide. Referring to the Secretary's previous remarks, he contended that the Secretary had implied that he did not regard the question of a peace treaty and of West Berlin as very important. The USSR could not agree with such a view. He said he wished to reiterate what Mr. Khrushchev had said to the President in Vienna, namely, that the USSR regarded this problem as the most acute and extremely crucial one. He contended that in speaking of the German problem the Secretary and other US officials sometimes seem to use words and formulations lightly. Conversely, the USSR had been displaying a more serious attitude and weighed its words.

The Secretary stressed that he did not wish that there be any misunderstanding on Mr. Gromyko's part. He reiterated that Western presence in West Berlin, the freedom of access to West Berlin, and West Berlin's freedom to choose its own way of life were vital interests of the United States and of the West, and emphasized that the word "vital" meant life or death. He said that he did not wish to minimize the importance of this problem but only to place it in the context of the broader interests of our peoples and to point out the necessity of resolving the problem without conflict. He stated that the two governments should not engage in a dangerous game on top of the roof of a house in which millions of people were going about their daily work. There must be no such dangerous game because this was the matter of our vital interest which we intended to treat as such.

Mr. Gromyko contended that if there was anybody engaged in such a game, it was not the USSR. The USSR approached the problem with all seriousness and responsibility. However, it believed that this was the area where the interests of the two sides collided most acutely and that therefore, the situation required solution. Although there were some other areas, such as Laos, where settlement was still outstanding, those were areas where the interests of the two sides did not actually collide. He reiterated his assertion that the USSR approached this problem most seriously; it could be noticed that the other side approached it lightly and indulged in strong words.

The Secretary stated that he did not quite understand the meaning of the word "lightly". He observed that perhaps there was a misunderstanding in Moscow. For three years the USSR had been making proposals to which the United States and the West had said "NO". This was not light and neither was the President's July 25 speech light. The Secretary emphasized that it

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would be a serious mistake if anyone in Moscow believed that the US was joking in this matter.

Mr. Gromyko responded that this was exactly what he had in mind. It was a mistake to believe that the use of strong words by US military or civilians sufficed to change the position of the USSR. It was this that he called approaching the problem lightly.

Mr. Gromyko then reiterated that the USSR's choice number 1 was to resolve the problem on the basis of agreement with the West and that the Soviet Union would act without the West only if no such agreement were reached. He asserted that the USSR had come to Geneva in the hope that something could be done to bring the positions of the two sides closer together. The US had said that it was prepared to continue the discussions; the USSR was also prepared and therefore we should see what results could be achieved.

The Secretary said that with regard to Mr. Gromyko's remark he wished to point out that in a real sense it was quite impossible to act alone.

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place at 3:00 p.m. on March 22.

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